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THE FAITH OF JAPAN

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Shinto, Buddhism and Confucianism are three forms of religion which have thrived side by side in Japan for more than fourteen centuries. They have given the Japanese the elements of faith that have characterized the life of the nation. With an exception of a comparatively small number of Christians and agnostics, the latter rapidly growing in number, the whole people are nominally followers of the triple faith. Strange though it may seem, many of them believe in three religions without being conscious of conflicts that exist between one religion and another. One may consecrate a baby at its birth according to Shinto, he may follow the Buddhist ceremony in the burial, while for the conduct of daily life he may be a faithful pupil of Confucius. But each of these religions is radically different from the others in its origin, history, ideal, practice and what not.

The Indigenous Faith

Shinto is the only indigenous faith of Japan. It has neither founder nor dogma, neither a creed nor system. Its name, "the way of the God," was applied to a group of certain undefined beliefs, in order to distinguish it from other religions. It was at first a nature worship to which was later added the worship of deified men. Kami is the Japanese word for deity. "The term Kami is applied in the first place to the various deities of heaven and earth who are mentioned in the ancient records, as well as to their spirits which reside in the shrines where they are worshipped. More-

over, not only human beings, but birds and beasts, plants and trees, seas and mountains, and all other things whatsoever which deserve to be dreaded and revered for the extraordinary and pre-eminent powers which they possess, are called Kami." There have been added from time to time various new deities so that the number was stated as "eight hundred myriads," and the country was called "the Land of Gods."

The Shinto shrines are usually of very simple structure, always to be recognized by a peculiarly shaped gate called *torii*, formed of two upright and two horizontal beams.

There are at present 113,000 shrines, large and small, in the whole empire. When we compare it with the number in 1904, which was 190,000, it shows the decline of 77,000 in two decades. It is said the largest number of reductions in one year was more than 15,000, showing the wane of the primitive faith. But it is also interesting to learn that since the great earth-catastrophe of two years ago a reaction came, showing a slight increase rather than a decrease. It indicates an abiding power of the old belief among the mass of the people in spite of the rapid progress of modern education.

Oldest Records of Japan

The "Kojiki" (records of ancient things) and the "Nihongi" (Chronicle of Japan), ancient histories of Japan, the former completed in 712 A. D., and the latter in 720, are regarded by Shintoists as their sacred books. They contain myths, legends and

the earliest history of the people. There are also prayers in archaic style, called Norito, orally brought down from the pre-historic period. Shinto being inseparable from national life, naturally associates with itself the sense of loyalty and patriotism. Except during certain limited periods, it has been the religion of the Imperial family from the beginning to the present day. This fact largely explains the secret of its strength.

It should be noted that the term Shinto includes two distinct aspects: State Shinto and popular Shinto. State Shinto has been officially declared to be not a religion, but merely a deep veneration of the Imperial ancestors and festivities and rites in memory of national heroes. These rites are under the control of the government Bureau of Shrines. Popular Shinto is divided into thirteen principal sects, some of which are further subdivided. These sects have nothing to do with the Bureau of Shrines, but are supervised like other religious organizations by the Bureau of Religions.

A Significant Fact About Shinto

A significant fact about Shinto is the absence of all tendency to objectify the deity in visible form. The use of images and idols is not indigenous to Japan, for one characteristic of pure Shinto is the absence of all figures. A mirror is usually placed in the holy place within the shrine. Such sacred mirrors are not strictly objects of worship, but are "typical of the human heart which in its purity reflects the image of Deity;" and faithful followers of Shinto are instructed to bow before the mirror of

the shrine in the act of self-examination. Image-making dates from the coming of Buddhism; and the influence of Buddhism in this particular is to be noted even upon Shinto, for gradually a mutual adaptation took place and various images came to be placed in Shinto shrines. The custom of keeping the family tablet of ancestors was also introduced with Buddhism from China.

Similarly noticeable is the absence of any attempt to define the character or attributes of Kami. The Japanese mind in all ages has been quite content without definite conceptions of Kami. The people have not cared to idolize Kami even to their spiritual sight. Kami should remain forever mysterious and incomprehensible. To leave them alone and revere them from a distance was the principle usually followed.

"What here may be enshrined I know not;
Yet solemn tears of thankfulness mine eyes
o'erflow."

Shinto is a religion without a creed, and without ethical requirement; yet from the first, sincerity of heart and ceremonial cleanliness have been demanded.

Harai tamaye, Kiyome tamaye!

Cleanse, I implore thee, Purify, I pray!
This the worshipper cries as with washing
of mouth and hands he prepares to present
himself before the gods. There is no doubt
that Shinto encouraged cleanliness, a prominent national habit of the Japanese.

The Chinese Learning

Confucianism came with the introduction of Chinese literature into Japan, which first took place in the fifth century. The Chinese learning was at once adopted by the court and speedily spread among the upper classes of the people. Confucianism has never been a religion in the strict sense; it has always remained a school of learning in Japan. Confucius himself was a teacher more than a philosopher, not a religious leader. But his political and ethical teachings have been the most powerful influence in the formation of the ethical character of the Japanese, separately from or mixed with other religions.

The followers of Confucius in Japan are not of one body, but are divided into a number of schools. All these schools, however, were united in their devotion to Confucius, "before whom no one lived as great and after whom there will be no one equal to him." All of them agreed in regarding the Four Books and the Five Classics as authoritative. The Four Books occupied for them the place which the Four Gospels hold for Christians. Among the four, the Analects stood first and highest, for it contained the personal teachings of Confucius. Many book written in colloquial for the common people were based on Confucian teachings, so that the influence of the Chinese sage extended far beyond the circle of the literary class.

According to Confucian teaching, there are five relations in life. They are those of ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger

brother, and friend and friend. The sum of human virtue is also five: love or humanity, justice or righteousness, propriety, knowledge or understanding, and faith or truthfulness. The Japanese as well as Chinese found in Confucianism a code of inter-human conduct, which men should practice in their daily life.

Shunti or the Supreme Ruler

Introduction of Chinese learning modified earlier conception of the Kami. Many centuries before Christ, the Chinese worshipped Shunti or the Supreme Ruler. They believed that by his decree kings ruled and executed judgment; in his hands were the issues of life and death. This ancient faith has been preserved until our day. At the grand altar of Heaven in Peking sacrifice was offered with auspicious ceremony to the Imperial Heaven-Supreme Ruler by the emperor once a year at the winter solstice.

Confucius preferred Tien or the Heaven in place of Shunti. Tien in Chinese characters means one great; and by that is signified either the blue sky, and impersonal something, or the Supreme Being. Confucius never philosophized concerning the idea of Heaven. The "Heaven" of Confucius is far from the speculative conceptions of pantheistic philosophers, and comes nearer signifying personal being. Otherwise it is hard to explain some of his sayings as, for example, "He who offends Heaven has none to whom he can pray," or "It is only Heaven who knoweth me." The worship of Tien or Shunti was never instituted in Japan. But the ideas of Tien

and Kami mutually influenced each other until through association the terms at present are well-nigh interchangeable. If we may say that Tien universalized the idea in Kami, it would also be fair to say that Kami personalized the idea in Tien.

The Introduction of Buddhism

A. D. 552 is usually spoken of as the date of the introduction of Buddhism to Japan. In that year the king of Kudara, one of three kingdoms in Korea, presented to the emperor of Japan a statue of Buddha, scriptures, banners, and other ritual instruments, accompanied by a letter, in which Buddhism was praised as "the most excellent of all teachings." It was a personal missionary message from a king to a sovereign. In regard to this new religion, the court was divided into two parties. The history of Buddhism for the following fifty years is a record of its rise and fall with one party or the other.

An earnest and the most powerful adherent of Buddhism was found in Prince Shotoku, the Constantine of Japanese Buddhism. This imperial prince flourished early in the seventh century. He prepared a constitution of the country in seventeen articles, in which Buddhism was proclaimed the foundation of the state and the highest religion in the universe. Temples and monasteries, educational and philanthropic institutions increased. Priests and nuns, many of them from the Imperial family, entered religious orders. Different sects were established one after another by priests, Chinese and Korean, as well as by the Japanese who brought back fruits of their study in China.

Buddhism is of Indian origin. The founder, Gautama, belonged to a high caste family called Sakya in the northern portion of India. His father was the chief or patriarch of a clan. A story of his early life narrates that "when he was surrounded by luxury there came to him the realization of the disgust man feels at the sight of old age and sickness and death, and as he pondered these things, his enjoyment of life vanished." It was the beginning of his quest after the enlightenment or the lasting peace of mind. For several years he wandered from one teacher to another seeking redemption by the way of knowledge but failed. Whereupon he tried the most rigorous austerities without success. Disappointed and deserted he sat beneath the Bo-tree, and spent four weeks in fasting and meditation, and at last attained the enlightenment. For forty years or more Gautama traveled far and wide preaching the way of emancipation "from suffering in this world of suffering." He lived to be eighty years old and died not long before or after 480 B. C.

Buddhism as it exists in Japan, and other countries, is apparently a religion of contradictions. It is most philosophical in one form of it, grossly confused in the other. Sects and divisions are almost innumerable. The objects of worship and doctrines concerning them are absolutely beyond the comprehension of an ordinary mind. The scriptures amount to several thousand volumes in all. Intellectually Buddhism is a speculative idealism; practically it is a mass of idolatry.

There are two great branches. One is

the Mahayana or Great Vehicle doctrine, the other the Hinayana or Small Vehicle doctrine. They are sometimes called from their geographical prevalence the Northern and the Southern branches. With the exception of two small sects, now extinct, all Japanese Buddhism, past and present, belongs to the Mahayana. Mahayanists claim their teaching to be later but more developed and more philosophical, therefore the more comprehensive of the two systems of Buddhistic belief.

Sects and Sub-sects

Fourteen principal sects of Buddhism there are in Japan, many of which are divided into a large number of sub-divisions. Time does not allow me to refer to these various sects, but it may be of interest if I mentioned some of the sects represented in the territory.

I. Shingon Sect was founded by Kobo, an illustrious name in the history of Japanese Buddhism. He was commissioned by the emperor to visit China in 804, came back two years later and founded Shingon Sect. Magnificent temples with hundreds of halls and monasteries on Mount Koya are lasting monuments to his memory. The chief deity of the sect is called Dainichi or the Great Illumined, who is sometimes identified with the Sun Goddess of Shinto. Gautama Buddha, according to Kobo, is only one of many manifestations of eternal Dainichi. Shingon is the True Word, the efficacious formula, and by knowing the True Word, desired results can be achieved. Shingon priests are thus held to be masters of occult powers and are

"employed to secure for the living the attainment of their desires, and for the dead the mitigation of the pains of hell." The sect is now third in number among the sects of Japan.

2. Soto is one of the divisions of Zen sect. Zen has as its aim the realization of the real and unchanging self which lies behind the world of sense. Consequently it lays the stress on meditation. The sect has had great influence among the samurai of earlier times and army officers of today. The popularity is due to its emphasis on self-discipline and self-control. In its various forms the Zen sect has today a larger number of temples than any other Buddhist sect in Japan.

3. Jodo or Pure Land sect was founded by Honen in A. D. 1175, but the worship of Amida existed long before that year. Amida, the Ruler of the Western Paradise, is a mighty and merciful Buddha, who made a vow that he should not become a Buddha until he had accumulated merits to save all who put their trust in him. Honen proclaimed salvation for all mankind not by meditation nor by ritual, but by the "repetition of the name of Amida Buddha with faith in his boundless mercy, whereby we may be born in the happiest Pure Land." The fundamental tenet of Honen's religion consisted of faith in the power of the all compassionate and almighty Amida, the Lord of the Pure Land.

4. Shin sect or Jodo-Shin-Shu (Pure Land True Sect) was established by Shinran, sometimes called the Martin Luther of Buddhism. He was a disciple of Honen, but he went much further than his master

in the application of the doctrine of salvation by faith. He forbade the worship of all Buddhas but Amida and denied the merit of any possible deed for the salvation of the believer, preaching absolute dependence in faith on the merit of that one supreme Buddha. Na-mu-A-mi-da-Butsu, an expression of six written characters, meaning glory to Amida Buddha is the prayer, the adoration and creed of the Shin sect. Following the example of Shinran who married a princess, breaking the Buddhist tradition, the priests in this sect marry and are householders.

In Kyoto are two head temples of the sect called Hongwanji, the west and the east representing two divisions of the sect. Both have magnificent wooden structures of huge dimensions, each with a number of subordinate buildings. The Shin sect is at present the most popular church in Japanese Buddhism, and has shown great adaptability to modern conditions, and in recent years has adopted many of the methods of Christian propaganda.

5. Nichiren, who flourished in the thirteenth century, was the founder of the sect bearing his own name. He was a man of vigorous personality and uncompromising zeal. It was at the time when Japan was under fear of invasion by the Mongol Emperor. Nichiren warned the nation that, if they accepted not the true faith, the country would be vanquished by the invader. The chief scripture upon which his system was founded was the Lotus of the Good Law. He strongly denounced the worship of Amida and proclaimed the supremacy of Gautama, who was stated as the eternal Buddha in the

heavens. The sect has retained something of the founder's fanaticism and is the most aggressive type of the Buddhist church even at the present time.

An Outstanding Conception

The foregoing brief sketches of a few sects will be sufficient to show that there are all sorts of beliefs and manners in so-called Buddhism. There are, however, certain outstanding conceptions or ideas which will represent the religion as a whole. The most conspicuous of these outstanding conceptions is that of Satori or enlightenment. It best conveys to the Japanese mind the religious ideal of Buddhism. Spiritual enlightenment by the dispersion of ignorance, or a perfect understanding of the truth by liberation from false and erroneous ideas, may be said to be the final goal of Buddhist teaching.

The ways and means of attaining this final goal are different according to sects and sub-sects. The Buddhist will say:
From varied sides the paths ascend,

Many and far abreast,
But when we gaze on the calm full-moon

Single's the mountain's crest.

Buddhism revealed to the Japanese a more serious view of life. It taught the impermanence of all things and that nothing exists which endures. Satisfaction should not be sought in the externals of the world. Peace may not be found amidst the constant changes of life. From Buddhism Japan gained a conception of the universe at once broader, more inclusive, and far

more complex than that depicted in her naive belief of Shinto.

From the Satori of Buddhism thus came Japan's aspiration for ultimate reality behind the changing cause-governed phenomena of the world and that calm disposition so well imaged in Daibutsu, the colossal bronze statue at Kamakura, which one has described as "a true symbol of the central idea of Buddhism, the spiritual peace which comes of perfected knowledge and the subjugation of all passions."

Bushido, the Code of Samurai

Any exposition of the faith of the Japanese would be incomplete without a reference to Bushido, the code of the samurai or knightly class. It is not a religion nor a system of morality. It has never been organized, but has always remained a principle. The indigenous faith, with Chinese ethics and Indian philosophy, combined to develop the principle that arose as a product of the social environment of the feudal system. Bushido has inspired the Japanese breast with the spirit of loyalty and patriotism. F. Brinkley, the author of *History of Japanese People* goes as far as to say, "If religion be the source from which springs the motives of men's noblest actions, then the religion of Japan was neither the Law of the Buddha, nor the Path of the Gods, but the Way of Warriors." For the description of Bushido I refer you to Dr. Nitobe's "Bushido," a classic among books relating to the Japanese, being translated into a dozen languages.

Christianity, Catholic and Protestant

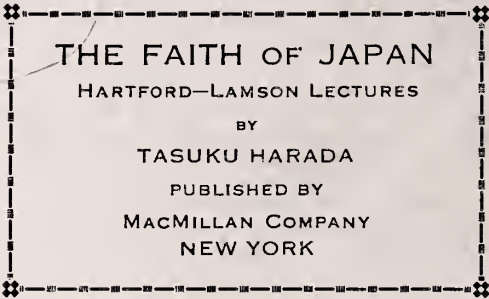
The sixteenth century witnessed the coming of Roman Catholic Christianity. At one time it counted several hundreds of thousands of converts. Some of the daimyos were earnest believers. But it was practically stamped out by bitter persecutions, chiefly for political reasons, after a brief life not long enough to play a role in the spiritual development of the nation.

At the opening of the country in the middle of the nineteenth century Christianity was introduced for the second time, and is making headway in all parts of the empire. During the past three decades Roman and Greek Catholics as well as the Protestants of Europe and America have commissioned their missionaries in several thousands. Educational and social institutions as well as religious have been inaugurated. Among the three forms of Christian churches the Protestant counts nearly two hundred thousand of communicants. The two Catholic will add to them about a hundred thousand, making the total number of the professing Christians as three hundred thousands. The influence of the Christian church, however, should not be measured by its numerical figures. Christianity is already recognized as one of the three religions of Japan, the other two being Buddhism and Shinto. The name of Christ is upheld by non-Christians as well as the Christian as a great religious teacher at par with Gautama and Confucius. Particularly in its social activities the Christian church leads all other religious organizations.

Christianity and Other Religions

Christianity has been a spur to the old religions and has aroused them to new activity. The many signs of new life lately displayed by Buddhism and Shintoism can not be referred to a single cause, but the spread of Christianity has had a great influence over them all. Buddhists and Shintoists have established schools for the education of the priests and the laity. Some of them have founded Young Men's Associations, Women's societies, Sunday Schools, and all sorts of charitable institutions. Recently the wedding ceremony was innovated in their temples in imitation of the Christian ceremony, and it is becoming popular among the people.

Japan, with all her progress in the arts and crafts of civilization, and all her friendliness toward Christian ethical standards, is far from being a Christian nation, but it is evident that Christian truths and ideals are actively at ferment, mightily affecting the ethico-religious life of the Japanese in all its aspects.



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